

CHAPTER VIII.

POLITICAL THOUGHT IN FRANCE AS INFLUENCED BY THE STRUGGLE FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.

OTHER great principles, besides liberty of conscience, found expression in the controversial literature of the period, if not in the statute book. The long struggle desolated France, but it excited political as well as theological discussion, and fructified the French intellect. The age was indeed remarkably fertile in political theories, fruit of the tremendous ferment of the national mind. Religious persecution was the nurse of political liberty. Persecution led men to question the right of the persecutor to oppress them. The Protestant had begun by denying the power of the pope; he ended by challenging the power of the king, in those countries at least where the civil power showed itself hostile to his creed. The Protestant soon learned in the hard school of persecution to outrun Luther and Calvin, and throw to the winds the doctrines of divine right and absolute submission. In France, Holland, Scotland, in particular, he was driven to modify, sometimes flatly to contradict, the servile views of the earlier reformers, to emphasise anew the old doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, to strengthen it by new arguments, as against that of a persecuting monarch. Conscience postulated political as well as moral liberty. It could not in practice endorse Calvin's doctrine of the consistence of political servitude with Christian liberty. Partly on historical, partly on theoretic, partly on religious grounds, the dogma of absolute monarchy was subjected to the test of criticism, weighed in the balance and found wanting. It was no longer the great battle, Kaiser *versus* Pope, and *vice versa*, that was being waged between the contending theologians and jurists. The war was directed by the Protestant scribes against both king and pope. Neither prince nor priest, urged these